

Mao's China: Ideology, Violence, and Afterlives

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Course Overview:

This is an introductory course to Maoism as ideology, revolutionary practice, governing project, and political inheritance from the 1930s through the Xi era. It asks how a revolutionary party translated ideas about class, practice, mass mobilization, gender, labour, *minzu*, and socialist transformation into laws, campaigns, institutions, as well as everyday lives and social categories. The course moves between high politics and lived experience, including Mao's theoretical writings, legal and constitutional texts, Party resolutions, fiction, memoir, work-unit life, rural campaigns, and the politics of historical judgment. It also follows Maoism's afterlives in the post-Mao period, namely Deng-era reform and reassessment, rehabilitation and selective forgetting, Tiananmen and the limits of political liberalization, and Xi-era uses of Maoist language, discipline, symbolism, and Party authority.

Timetable:

Lunedì 1 marzo, 17-19, Aula 2
Lunedì 8 marzo, 17-19, Aula 2
Lunedì 15 marzo, 17-19, Aula 2
Lunedì 22 marzo, 17-19, Aula 2
Lunedì 5 aprile, 17-19, Aula 2
Lunedì 12 aprile, 17-19, Aula 2
Lunedì 19 aprile, 17-19, Aula 2
Lunedì 26 aprile, 17-19, Aula 2
Lunedì 3 maggio, 17-19, Aula 2
Lunedì 10 maggio, 17-19, Aula 2

Assessment:

The examination consists of two components: course participation and seminar paper.

Course participation includes active engagement in the analysis of primary sources, the discussion of secondary literature, and the collective interpretation of historical problems raised in the course.

For the seminar paper, students can choose one of the following types of writing assignments:

1.) Choose a theme from the course that particularly interests you. Create a timeline of events and periods related to the event, movement, idea, war, or social phenomenon you have selected.

Analyze its historical development and discuss its significance in the context of modern Chinese history.

2.) Select a theme from the course that resonates with your interests and provide a brief overview. Situate this theme within a comparative framework by identifying a similar or related theme from your own area of research or geographical focus. Highlight the similarities and differences between the two and reflect on how this comparison offers broader insights into global or regional historical processes and the methodologies of historical analysis.

The seminar paper should be around 3000 words, excluding footnotes. Citations should be provided in footnotes; no separate bibliography is required. Citations should adhere to the Chicago Manual of Style, 18th Edition.

Readings:

https://scuolasupmeridionale-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/a_xu_ssmeridionale_it/IgDJp4toIJNiTYaJRFzy3EioAZQ-xYfG0n1alikhbf4a1Xqg?e=EC1eqH

When a direct link is provided in the syllabus for a specific source, that material will not be uploaded to the folder. Students are therefore expected to consult the syllabus carefully and should not rely solely on the files uploaded to the shared folder.

1. Revolution, ideology, and the founding of the PRC

Theme:

How Maoism emerged from the revolutionary period, and how 1949 transformed party, state, and society.

Source:

- Mao Zedong, “On Practice” (1937).

https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm

Secondary readings:

- Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, part one.

- Stuart R. Schram, “Mao Tse-tung’s Thought to 1949,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 13.

2. Land reform and class struggle

Theme:

Violence, redistribution, and the creation of a new rural order.

Source:

- Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China (1950).

Secondary readings:

- Brian DeMare, *Land Wars: The Story of China's Agrarian Revolution*, chapter 3.
- Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation*, chapter 4.

3. Gender, family, and everyday socialist transformation

Theme:

How the state entered everyday life through marriage law, household politics, and class labels.

Sources:

- Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China (1950).

Secondary readings:

- Gail Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*, chapter 1.
- Felix Wemheuer, *A Social History of Maoist China*, chapter 1.
- Yang Kuisong, "How a 'Bad Element was made,'" in Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, eds., *Maoism at the Grassroots*.

4. Industrialization, planning, urban socialism, and youth under high socialism

Theme:

The Soviet model, the First Five-Year Plan, *danwei* life, socialist legality, labour discipline, youth, and political dependence.

Sources:

Dartmouth's Down to the Countryside Movement collection, selected memoir, diary, photograph, or correspondence items.

<https://www.library.dartmouth.edu/digital/digital-collections/down-countryside-movement>

Secondary readings:

- Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism*, introduction.
- Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, chapter 9.

5. *Minzu*, nationality classification, and frontier state-building

Theme:

The "nationalities question," ethnic classification, regional autonomy, frontier incorporation, socialist transformation, and the tension between equality, autonomy, and state integration.

Sources:

- Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (1949), articles on nationalities, especially Articles 50–53.
- General Programme of the People's Republic of China for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy for Nationalities (1952).

Secondary readings:

- Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*, introduction, chapter 5.
- Benno Weiner, *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier*, introduction, chapter 6.

6. Hundred Flowers and Anti-Rightism

Theme:

Criticism, dissent, intellectual participation, and the political limits of “contradictions among the people.”

Source:

- Mao Zedong, “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” (1957).
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm

Secondary readings:

- Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 1, chapter 16, part 4.
- Timothy Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, chapter 4.

7. The Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine

Theme:

Mass mobilization, communes, steel production, utopian planning, coercion, and famine.

Source:

- Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Chengdu Conference” (1958).
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_06.htm

Secondary readings:

- Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone*, chapter 2.
- Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine*, part 1, part 6.

8. The Cultural Revolution

Theme:

Red Guards, mass politics, factional violence, attacks on authority, and the breakdown of party-state institutions.

Source:

- “Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” the “Sixteen Points” of 8 August 1966.
- Mao’s “Letter to the Red Guards of Tsinghua University Middle School.”
http://marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_60.htm

Secondary readings:

- Andrew G. Walder, *Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement*, chapter 1, chapter 3.
- Andrew G. Walder, “the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” in *The Cambridge History of Communism*, vol. 2.

9. Post-Mao reckoning: *Scar Literature*, rehabilitation, and the official verdict on Mao

Theme:

How the post-1976 period judged, narrated, limited, and reused the Maoist past.

Source:

- Lu Xinhua, “Scar” (1978) and Liu Xinwu, “Teacher” (1977).
- 1981 “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the PRC.” <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm>

Secondary readings:

- Sebastian Veg, “Creating a Literary Space to Debate the Mao Era.”
- Jie Li, *Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era*, introduction.

10. Reform, Tiananmen, and the Xi-era legacy of Maoism

Theme:

How reform-era China preserved political limits while transforming the economy, how 1989 exposed the boundaries of dissent, and how the Maoist past has been reinterpreted through Party legitimacy and Xi-era ideological revival.

Sources:

- People’s Daily, “We Must Take a Clear-Cut Stand against Disturbances,” 26 April 1989.
- Xi Jinping, “Speech at the Symposium Commemorating the 120th Anniversary of the Birth of Comrade Mao Zedong” (2013).

Secondary readings:

- Jeremy Brown, *June Fourth: The Tiananmen Protests and Beijing Massacre of 1989*, chapters 2, 3, and 5.
- Jude Blanchette, *China’s New Red Guards: The Return of Radicalism and the Rebirth of Mao Zedong*, introduction and chapter 5.